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Communities of practice as a locus of language change

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1. Introduction

Languages change and they keep changing. This is one of the few truisms about language, but – in fact – strictly speaking this generalization does not capture exactly what is happening. What really happens is that speakers use linguistic resources when they communicate, linguistic resources that are sufficiently similar from one speaker to the next to enable successful communication, but – on occasions – the resources are not identical. Pronunciations may differ a little from one speaker to the next or even for one speaker on one occasion and on another occasion. Lexical items may have a slightly different range of meanings for one speaker than they have for another speaker. Syntactic structures used by one speaker may deviate a little from structures used by other speakers and so on. If individual speakers use linguistic resources that deviate a little from the linguistic resources that other speakers use for the same purpose, nothing much happens as long as communication still works. The speaker may appear to have his or her own ways, or – if the differences are a little more significant – he or she may appear to be somewhat strange. But if other speakers imitate these differences, if these special ways of communicating spread to more and more speakers, the linguistic resources change, and – in a way of speaking – the language changes. The important point is that a language is not an independent entity but a conglomerate of linguistic resources which exist only if they are used by speakers in communicative settings. The resources are diverse and subject to synchronic variation and diachronic change.

These observations are not new, of course, but they direct the attention of scholars interested in linguistic change to the communicative settings in which such changes take place. They take place when people communicate with each other and when a new pronunciation, a new shade of meaning, a new way of constructing a clause, or a new way of performing a particular speech act is adopted by new speakers and passed on within a group of interconnected speakers. If we want to understand the processes of language change, therefore, we must consider them in the context of the networks of speakers who use specific linguistic resources. We must focus on individual members of such networks who introduce innovations (i.e. deviations from the traditional ways) and on how such innovations spread within the network. Without a network of communicators, a community of people communicating with each other, linguistic change cannot happen. Thus, in this volume we want to focus on how language changes as a result of communities of people interacting with each other.

In the next section, we shall give an overview of different conceptualizations of communities of speakers within the different fields of linguistics, pointing towards the applicability of these approaches for the study of language history. The ways in which communities of speakers have been conceptualized may differ considerably in some aspects, but they may also overlap in some others. In section 3, we justify why we have chosen "communities of practice" as our point of reference, and the final section of this introduction provides a brief overview of the papers in this volume.

2. Community frameworks in (historical) linguistics

There is a long tradition of work in linguistics that puts the focus not on individual speakers but on speakers within communities. At the outset of modern linguistics, de Saussure explained the arbitrary nature of linguistic signs with reference to communities which agree to assign specific values to the signs (de Saussure 1983 [1972]: 112). In essence, the fluidity of this agreement is a prerequisite of language variation and change.

The idea that language use – and language change – depends on the social conditions in which communication takes place can be traced back to early writings of Bloomfield (1933), who used the term "speech community" to denote "a group of people who interact by means of speech" (1933: 42). The concept resurfaced in linguistic anthropology (Gumperz 1968, Hymes 1974) and sociolinguistics (Weinreich, Labov and Herzog 1968; Labov 1972) and has been subject to reassessments and evolving interpretations.[1] Outside the Anglophone linguistic tradition, the idea of a *communicative community* was put forward by a Polish Germanist, Indoeuropeanist and dialectologist, Ludwik Zabrocki (1963), who claimed that language change, especially the development of dialectal variation, is initiated and carried by communities of speakers. His view of a communicative community is broad:

> Zwei Personen, die aus irgendeinem Grunde das Bedürfnis empfinden, gegenseitig Nachrichten auszutauschen, oder dazu gezwungen sind, bilden eine kommunikative Gemeinschaft. Die kleinste natürliche kommunikative Gemeinschaft bildet die Familie. Andere Arten von kommunikativen Gemeinschaften bildet die Schulklasse, die Belegschaft einer Fabrik, die Kirchengemeinde, Wissenschaftler, Mediziner, Bewohner eines Dorfes, einer Stadt, ideologische Blocks, Bewohner eines Staates sowie endlich Bewohner der ganzen Welt. (1970: 3).
>
> [Two people, who, for some reason or other, feel the need or are forced to exchange information, form a communicative community. The family builds the smallest natural communicative community. Other types of communicative communities include a class at school, a factory workforce, a religious congregation, scientists, doctors, inhabitants of a village or a town, ideological groups, inhabitants of a country, as well as, ultimately, the inhabitants of the entire world. (our translation)]

In this broad definition of a community whose members engage (or may engage)[2] in a communicative activity and, because of their mutual relations, make specific linguistic choices, one can already notice the kernels of more recent sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic frameworks, such as a "discourse community" or a "community of practice" (see below).

These approaches mark a momentous change of perspective in linguistic inquiry: from language structure to language use in a social context. Further developments were brought about by Lesley Milroy's work on Belfast communities and the concept of a "social network" (Milroy 1980, 2002). Studies have shown (e.g. Milroy and Milroy 1985, 1992; Diamond 1996) that different outcomes of language change may be observed, depending on the characteristics of the social network through which it spreads. Close and loose networks were found to be conducive to different linguistic choices, and the forces of covert and overt pressure from within and outside the network have been identified as causes of language change and/or maintenance.

The work on communities and their language use has been, for the most part, based on current fieldwork and data collection. The diachronic dimension was typically limited to the change happening within the living memory of the informants. Adjusting these methods to the work of a historical linguist certainly posed a challenge, but – as numerous studies in historical sociolinguistics (cf. Nevalainen 2006) (or socio-historical linguistics, cf. Romaine 1982) have shown since the 1980s[3] – it is a doable and worthwhile pursuit.

There is one more important factor to introduce into the discussion of language in society. Language change does not depend solely on social factors (age, sex, level of education and income, etc.) relevant for the frameworks discussed so far, but also on the type of discourse in which it originates and the type of texts through which it spreads. Here the concept of a community is also relevant, as specific groups of people engage with specific types of texts and take part in specific discourse activities. Swales (1990) put forward six criteria which are necessary to treat a group of language users as a "discourse community". First of all, there have to be common public goals. The public nature of the communicative activities of a discourse community is a key ingredient in

Swales's concept, which means that, for instance, a family is not a good candidate. This social unit fails to fulfil other criteria too, e.g. genre ownership, which we discuss below. The second criterion for a discourse community is the existence of some mechanisms of intercommunication among its members. The same members must also use participatory mechanisms to provide information and feedback. What is important from the point of view of texts through which we get access to a community (where text is understood broadly as a product of discourse, see Widdowson 2004: 8) is that a discourse community possesses one or more genres and, therefore, exerts influence on its linguistic character – community creates genre. This criterion may also be interpreted in a reverse manner: access to and engagement with a particular genre allows an individual to be placed within a community – genre creates community (see also Devitt 2004). A related criterion concerns the use of specific lexis by the members of a discourse community in order to fulfil its communicative goals. Finally, for the community to stay active, there must be a certain level of members and ways of controlling the group dynamics (Swales 1990).

Swales's concept seems remarkably similar to the "community of practice", delineated by Lave and Wenger (1991) and later expounded in Wenger (1998). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992: 464) define it as follows.

> A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. As a social construct, a community of practice is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously

> by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages. (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992: 464)[4]

The last point about practice is an important addition to the earlier frameworks, and we devote more space to it below. For Meyerhoff (2002: 526), the community of practice is "an analytical domain" which usually encompasses a smaller population of language users but which can also guide us towards principles of language use of broader significance. If we accept the premise that language users in the past also displayed community behaviour[5] in the form of mutual engagement, jointly negotiated enterprise and shared repertoire of resources (Wenger 1998: 72-85), then it is worthwhile to place focus on these groups – communities of practice – as potential initiators and transmitters of language change.

There are correlations and interactions between community-related concepts but it only proves the complexity of human endeavours and groupings. Different frameworks stress different aspects which are crucial and constitutive to a given type of community. The forms and functions of language use in these varying types of community will therefore differ too, and we would not be able to account for all linguistic decisions of language users simply by making reference to a single type of community. For example, the distinction between social networks and communities of practice is based "chiefly [on] method and focus. Network analysis typically deals with structural and content properties of the ties that constitute egocentric personal networks ... [but] cannot address the issues of how and where linguistic variants are employed ... to construct local social meanings. Rather, it is concerned with how informal social groups ... support local norms or ... facilitate linguistic change" (Milroy and Gordon 2003: 19). Moreover, social networks are based on the existence of social ties between its members, weak or strong as they may be. As Holmes and Meyerhoff put it, "[a] social network requires QUANTITY of interaction; a C[ommunity] of P[ractice] requires QUALITY of interaction" (1999: 180, emphasis original)[6] and relies on mutual engagement.

Another case in point may be the distinction between a discourse community and a community of practice. Similar as they might seem on the surface, on closer inspection the two concepts are built around different defining features and stem from different perspectives on language use. As shown convincingly by Watts (2009) in his discussion of eighteenth-century grammar writers and their prescriptive instructions, in certain cases only one of these conceptualizations of a community is appropriate to provide an explanatory framework for the ongoing linguistic changes. He argues that the grammarians formed prescriptive conventions within a discourse community of a polite eighteenth-century society, eager for social advancement. Engaged in a "common enterprise", the grammarians were not a community of practice because they "did not *share* an enterprise" (Watts 2009: 50-51, emphasis original), and they did not mutually engage in shaping and reshaping their linguistic practices. At the same time, smaller networks of common practice, which individual writers in all likelihood formed with their publishers, would exert a different kind of pressure on the linguistic choices in the publications (see Sairio, this volume, and Tyrkkö, this volume). This concern for an adequate description and understanding of the historical conditions in which communities were formed underlies the pragmaphilological perspective of the present book.

The frameworks discussed here have been built to work with a specific type of linguistic data: from those observed synchronically by a researcher, controlled for various social factors, to the data whose character is driven by the nature of discourse and genre. The uniting feature permeating these approaches is the use of language by *a* community, in a broad Zabrockian sense. The appropriation of these frameworks to historical data is challenging but it allows us to see a range of social driving forces behind language use and language change. The criticism of "bad data" in historical linguistics, which Labov described as "produced by a series of historical accidents" (1972: 100), has already been refuted by sociohistorical linguists (Romaine 1982: 121-126). The recent advances in the compilation of historical corpora and meticulous archive work with original handwritten and printed material open new research possibilities and offer a new understanding of the intricate correlation between language, text and society. Out of the possible angles of looking at language use in historical communities, we choose the focus on *practice*, and investigate how it shapes the linguistic practices of a given community and how a community joined by practice uses language to achieve its communicative goals.

3. Communities of practice in historical linguistics

According to the definition by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992: 464) quoted in the previous section, a community of practice is defined both by its membership and by the practices the members engage in. It refers not just to a group of people who share a certain characteristic feature but a group of people who interact and share ways of doing things. Wenger (1998: 72-85) develops this definition in more detail. He provides Figure 1 as an illustration.

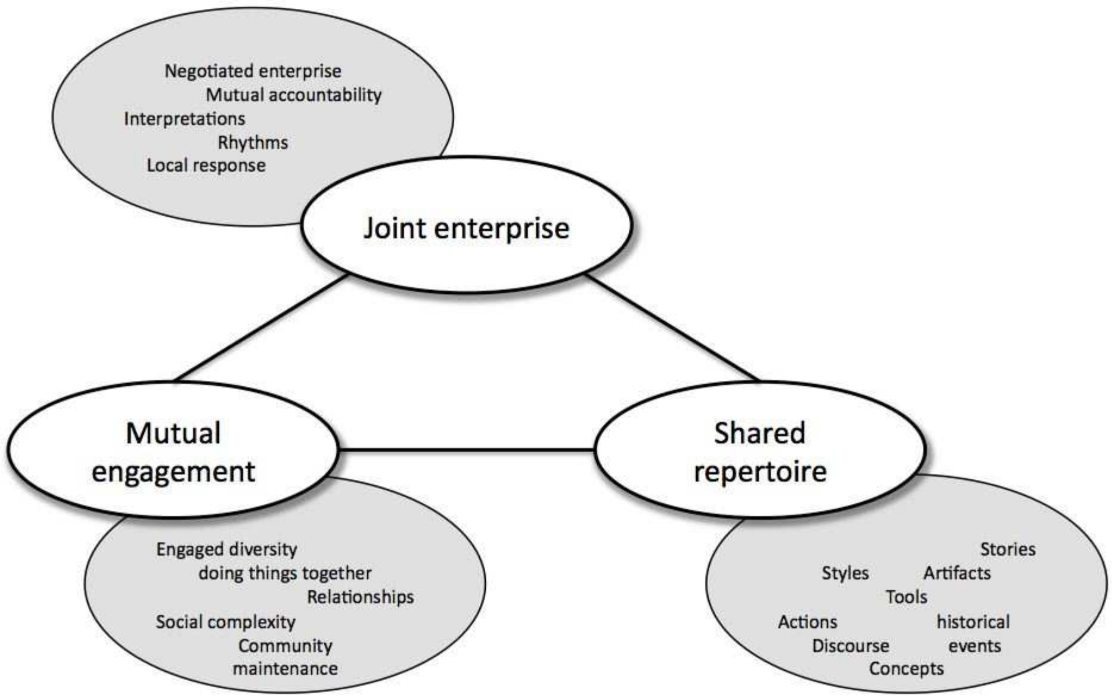

Figure 1: General dimensions of practice (Wenger 1998: 73)

There are three criteria that are crucial for a community of practice: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire (for a summary see also Meyerhoff 2002). The first criterion, mutual engagement, refers to the fact that a community of practice is a group of people who get together to engage in shared practices and negotiate the meanings of these practices. A workplace is a prototypical situation of such mutual engagements. People come together in order to do things together. They share daily routines and activities, and they are embedded in complex social relations that are enacted and reinforced in these practices. Meyerhoff points out that mutual engagements can be more or less harmonious. She mentions a group of women who regularly get together on a Friday evening to enjoy a drink and share the experiences of their individual working weeks. The routines and practices of this group will be largely positive and harmonious, each member supporting the others. As an example of a less harmonious group she refers to a group of divisional heads (e.g. department chairs) who interact regularly in meetings to discuss shrinking budget allocations. They too share practices and negotiate meanings, even if their interactions may be far less harmonious than in the Friday evening group. These groups do not have to be homogeneous, but the individual members are related to each other. As Wenger (1998: 76) puts it:

> A community of practice is neither a haven of togetherness nor an island of intimacy insulated from political and social relations. Disagreement, challenges, and competition can all be forms of participation. As a form of participation, rebellion often reveals a greater commitment than does passive conformity.

The second criterion refers to the pursuit of a joint enterprise in which the members of a community of practice engage. In the case of the department heads the joint enterprise may be explicit and clear, in other cases the members of a specific community of practice may not be in a position to spell out the specific enterprise they are engaging in, but Meyerhoff (2002: 528) argues that the shared enterprise needs to be reasonably specific in order to constitute a community of practice.

The third criterion that characterizes a community of practice is a repertoire of resources shared and developed by its members. These resources may be linguistic or non-linguistic. A community of practice may typically develop a specific vocabulary for entities that are important in their joint engagement; they may develop phraseological conventions, interactive patterns, or turn-taking routines in their interactions. But the repertoire may also be non-linguistic such as gestures, ways of doing things, actions, and so on.

The notion of a community of practice was originally developed in order to describe workplace communities and the training of new members of these communities (Lave and Wenger 1991). New members are integrated into these workplace communities (Lave and Wenger give the examples of tailors and insurance company employees) by familiarizing them with the practices of the community. They are integrated into the mutual engagement; they become part of the joint enterprise and they learn to handle the full repertoire of resources. And in the process they become full members of the community. It is in this sense that a community of practice is defined both through its members and through the practices of these members.

The contributions of the present volume focus on a large variety of diverse communities of practice in the history of English. Not all of them show all three criteria to the same extent. The communities of practice assembled in this volume include various groups of correspondents, among them a group of influential eighteenth-century Scottish aristocrats, nineteenth-century Scottish families, scientists of the Royal Society. They include the members of a scribal workshop or a group of London printers. They also include a small community of literate clergy of the Anglo-Saxon period.

These communities are characterized to various degrees by their mutual engagement. The members of a scribal workshop, the notaries and clerks in the Scottish courts, and the members of the correspondence networks interact on a regular basis. In fact, the interaction is a constituting feature of their status as a community. In other cases the mutual engagement is perhaps somewhat less important as a definitional criteria, e.g. in the case of the London printers who are defined as a community more by the joint enterprise and their shared repertoire.

The communities are clearly defined through their various joint enterprises, such as the administration of justice in a Scottish courtroom, the dissemination of medical or religious learning, the production of manuscripts and books and so on, and they are defined – and this is the focus of this volume – by their shared repertoires, in particular their shared linguistic repertoires.

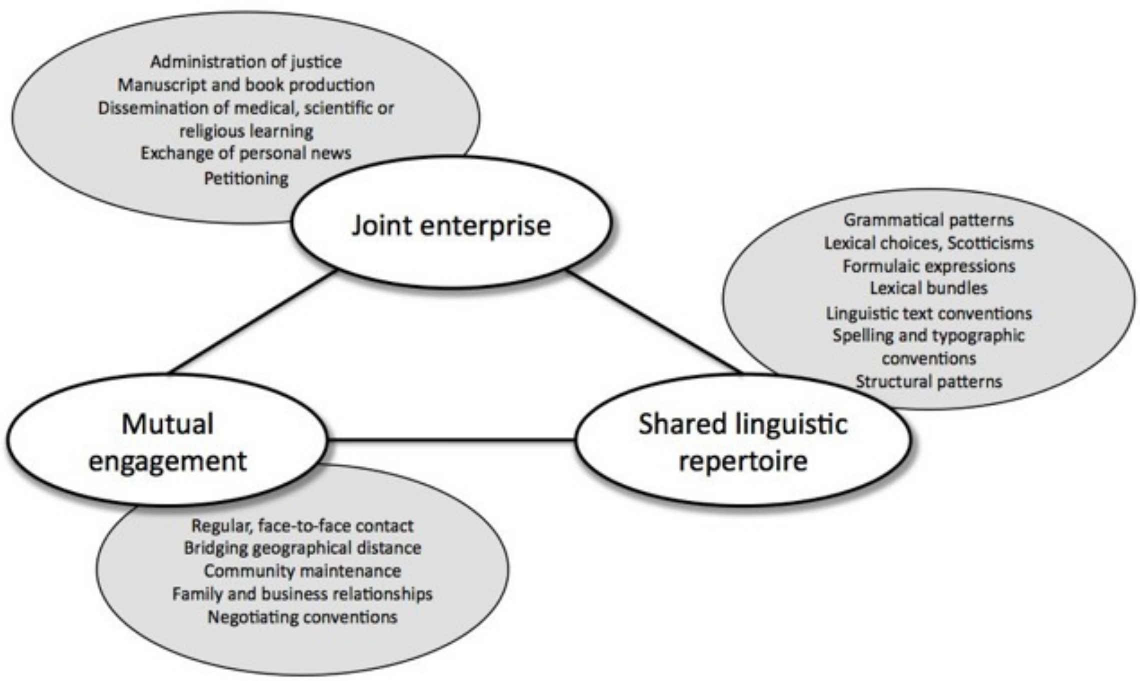

Figure 2: Specific dimensions of practice (adapted from Wenger 1998: 73)

Figure 2, which is a modification of Wenger's graph discussed above, gives an overview of the three essential criteria of communities of practice and how they manifest themselves in the different histories that are investigated in the contributions to this volume. They will be discussed in more detail in the context of the overview of chapters in the next section.

4. Chapter overview

This book consists of twelve chapters, each expounding the linguistic effects of a specific community practice. The contributions in this volume draw on a large and diverse range of communities of practice in the history of the English language, both in a temporal and geographical sense. The earliest community goes back to Anglo-Saxon England, but most of them are located in the Middle English and Early/Late Modern English period. The geographical perspective is mostly British, with several papers concerned with Scottish communities of practice. The volume also includes papers on aspects of linguistic practice in South African and Northern American English-speaking communities. Some of the papers focus synchronically on a community practice at a given point in time while others trace the diachronic changes on a given level of language within community practice.

The contributions fall into three well-defined parts depending on the members of a given community, their level of engagement with the text, and the types of their linguistic practice. The volume opens with four papers on communities of correspondents. The members of these groups interact by exchanging letters and developing lexical and structural resources (i.e. a shared repertoire) in the process. Letter-writers act as primary agents in the construction of the message; they engage in a direct exchange of information and seek mutual contact with the recipients. The second group contains four papers on scribes and printers who pursue the joint enterprise of producing manuscripts and books. Scribes and printers can be seen as professionals who concern themselves with the production and transmission of texts originally written by other people. They are intermediaries in bringing the message from the author to a wider public, which does not necessarily imply direct contact with either group but rather requires a shared repertoire of practices among the intermediaries to ensure the best effects of their enterprise. The third group, finally, is devoted to different groups of professionals. In contrast to scribes and printers, these professionals are authors of the texts and, in contrast to letter-writers, they do not address their writings to any particular individual. The last section thus contains four contributions on different professional realms: learning and religion, law, medicine and science.

4.1 Letter writers

The first part opens with a paper by JANET CRUICKSHANK on how the influential communities of practice, engaged in epistolary exchanges, contributed to the emergence of Scottish Standard English. The study is based on a rich collection of private letters from the 2nd Earl of Fife to his steward William Rose, written in the second half of the eighteenth century. A new resource for historical linguists, the letters were transcribed from unpublished manuscripts and provide an invaluable insight into language use in Scotland in the formative period of Scottish Standard English. Cruickshank studies the employment of "Scotticisms", which she first identifies on the basis of the writings of the Select Society of Edinburgh. The Society is depicted as the propagator of linguistic integration of Scotland and England also through their stigmatization of "Scotticisms". Cruickshank shows that an influential Scottish aristocrat, the 2nd Earl of Fife, keeps "Scotticisms", stigmatized as they are, within his own local community of practice, reflected in his correspondence with the estate steward. The author shows how practice overshadows prescriptivism and provides a structural and semantic analysis of the "Scotticisms" used by Fife.

The Scottish perspective is continued with the chapter by MARINA DOSSENA, who analyses nineteenth-century Scottish family and business letters. The data come from the *Corpus of Nineteenth-century Scottish Correspondence*, currently under construction at the University of Bergamo. The study focuses on the employment of religious discourse outside the domain of religion, i.e. in letter writing. Dossena claims that formulaic expressions from the field of religion constitute an important part of a community practice, as they reinforce community ties, mark socio-affective roles of the writers, and construct their identity. This interesting role of religious expressions outside their source domain can be noticed both in family correspondence as well as in business exchanges.

Not only lexical choices and formulaic expressions may result from shared practice in a community of letter-writers. In his contribution, RADOSŁAW DYLEWSKI shows how semi-literate soldiers share patterns of grammar, with the paradigms of the verb *to be* in focus. The data for the study comes mostly from manuscripts of unpublished Civil War letters of South Carolina privates, stored in American archives. A contribution to the study of the history of the Southern American Vernacular English, the paper concentrates on the past tense of the verb *to be*, which has so far been identified as an area of variation within a largely homogenous community grammar. Dylewski addresses the patterns of distribution of *was/were* in positive and negative contexts and correlates the use of a particular verb form with the type of subject, with the pronominal context coming to the fore. The author seeks the explanation for the patterns in the micro-communities of the letter-writers. In addition, the paper constitutes a voice in the methodological debate about the sources and methodologies used in establishing the beginnings of Southern American English.

The final paper in Part One, by MATYLDA WŁODARCZYK, addresses community practice in the emigrant context of early nineteenth-century Cape Colony petitions. These texts have been used to reconstruct the beginnings of South African English but it is necessary to acknowledge the dependence of their linguistic features on the requirements of the petition as a genre. In addition to petitions stored in manuscript format in Cape

Town, Włodarczyk uses material from the pre-colonial corpus to compare and contrast the structure of a petition as an epistolary genre. The author discerns two patterns of petition structure which can be explained with reference to two communities of practice: the experts and the learners. She also questions the homogenous and close-knit character of the community of Cape Colony settlers.

4.2 Scribes and printers

In Part Two we turn to communities of practice involved in the transmission of texts. JUSTYNA ROGOS, in her chapter on the spelling systems in ten manuscripts of the *Man of Law's Tale* (1430-1475), compares graphemic representations of the same underlying sounds and abbreviation conventions (superscripts and brevigraphs). She comes to the conclusion that not only do Middle English scribes constitute a community of practice on extralinguistic grounds, but they also confirm this status in the crafting of "text languages". The author takes into consideration centrifugal groups of individual scribes and explores the relationship between individuality and community practice visible in the spelling systems.

The discussion moves on to printed texts, with HANNA RUTKOWSKA concentrating on the typography and graphomorphemics, e.g. rendition of function words, in five editions of *The Kalender of Shepherdes* (1506-1570). The author portrays London printers as a layered community of practice, cooperating in book production with other professionals, often on a personal basis (e.g. Pynson and de Worde). They share a repertoire of resources, also in the physical form (type and woodcuts), which explains typographic decisions and the forms of function words, e.g. abbreviated as opposed to unabbreviated. Rutkowska shows that separate workshops had their own practices on top of shared ones. She also introduces a diachronic dimension to the community of printers and identifies the practice whereby apprentices use resources left by their predecessors.

The discussion of early modern orthography and printing continues in JUKKA TYRKKÖ's contribution on the emergence of uniformity in printed versions of medical books. The author explores selected textual subcategories from the recently published corpus of *Early Modern English Medical Texts* to reveal how printed texts deviate from authorial idiosyncratic production. The focus of the paper is twofold: the frequency of pre-standard spellings, and brevigraphs and macrons used by early modern London printing houses. Tyrkkö notices remarkable conformity in orthographic change, for instance in the disappearance of brevigraphs, across eighty-eight different printing houses and explains it by reference to the community-of-practice framework as well as close geographic and social proximity. He also stresses the applicability of corpus methods in book historical research.

The tension between authorial texts and printed versions comes to the fore again in the final contribution in Part Two. ANNI SAIRIO compares the draft and the printed version of the *Shakespeare Essay* by a prominent member of the Bluestocking network, Elizabeth Montagu (1769). As in the previous chapters, the linguistic focus is on orthography but it also extends to the physical features of the two versions of the essay as well as insertions, corrections, differences in punctuation, and capitalization. Sairio explores the creation of two communities of practice around a publishing enterprise: one community gathered around the production of the draft (the author and her intellectual circle), the other around the publication (renowned booksellers and publishers). The discussion shows that the community of practice centred around the draft was more conservative, while the publishers and booksellers updated the spellings to conform to public printing conventions of the day.

4.3 Professionals

Part Three continues the outlook on professional communities of practice. In the first contribution in this section, OLGA TIMOFEEVA shows that lexical choices of bilingual Latin/Old English literate clergy resulted from community membership. She studies the employment of the terms *Roman/Romanity* and *Latin/Latinity* in specific conceptual domains in a comprehensive corpus of Anglo-Latin (670s-800s) and Old English (850s-1050s) texts. The community under study shows a shared repertoire of associations of *Roman* and *Latin* but, at the same time, the author shows how Anglo-Latin vocabulary and concepts are first adopted in high registers and then transmitted to the vernacular. She also illustrates the distinction between a larger ecclesiastical community of practice and smaller local ones.

In the next chapter, JOANNA KOPACZYK discusses the textual effects of formulaic language use in the context of early legal discourse. Legal procedures in Scottish burghs relied on the expertise of notaries and clerks who constituted a community of practice through their involvement in this public enterprise. Concentrating on the linguistic choices of this professional community, Kopaczyk studies lexical bundles (4-grams) drawn from a collection of Middle Scots legal and administrative texts to show how their fixed form and content created stable reference to the participants of legal discourse. Areas of formulaicity include: reference to the authorities and community, reference to heirs and will executors, as well as repetitive reference to named individuals. Through stable, formulaic patterns of reference employed by the members of the professional community of practice, another community – the "text community" which uses these legal documents – can establish itself.

The discussion moves on to the field of medical discourse with HEBDA AND FABISZAK's paper on the lexical and collocational differences in the repertoires of two competing communities of practice among medical practitioners: physicians and surgeons. The authors attempt to trace how these two groups of writers referred to the humoral theory which underlies early modern medical discourse, how they wrote about other prominent topics (for instance the figures of authority), how they organized the texts, gave advice, provided clarification, and so on. The study is based on the *Corpus of Early Modern English Medical Texts* (1500-1700) and employs a wide range of corpus tools (collocations, keywords, and lexical bundles) to explore the linguistic choices of physicians and surgeons, also with reference to the intended audience and its needs.

Scientific discourse creates the frame for the formation of the Royal Society, as discussed by MAURIZIO GOTTI in the final chapter of the volume. The Royal Society gathered the most active and famous "natural philosophers" of seventeenth-century Britain. Eager to disseminate knowledge and contribute to its progress, the members collaborated in order to create the means to publicize their experiments and findings.

Gotti pays attention to the conventions of a linguistic and stylistic nature in the two major outlets for seventeenth-century scientists: *The Philosophical Transactions* and correspondence between the members of the Society. Through qualitative assessment of the extralinguistic criteria and the linguistic features of these writings, the author concludes that the Royal Society qualifies a community of practice and discourse.

All twelve chapters constitute original contributions to the study of the history of English in its regional and textual varieties in a broadly understood social context. Apart from adapting the communities of practice framework for historical linguistic research, the authors in this volume display an innovative approach to data and methodology. The majority of chapters are based on archive material, unpublished sources, and original texts which have not been discussed yet on a wide academic forum. The methodologies are typically data-oriented, but the analyses are supported with a thorough pragmaphilological engagement with the circumstances of text production and community creation. The importance of historical corpus linguistics has been confirmed again in its providing of both structured collections of data and new corpus tools (VARDing, lexical bundles, keywords, statistical calculations, etc.). It is the intention of the volume to bring to the fore the interdisciplinary character of historical linguistic studies, reaching into the history of the book, printing and publishing, multilingualism, identity research, and into other relevant socio-historical ramifications of language use. The community of practice approach, adopted and adapted from psychology and sociology, serves to highlight the agentive nature of language users and creates an explanatory framework for language forms and functions and – ultimately – for language change.

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Notes

[1] For recent overviews of scholarship on language and communities, see Wardhaugh (2010) and Ahearn (2012).

[2] Zabrocki was aware of the fact that the scope of his definition included communities which are in actual need of information exchange (*active* or *live* communities), as well as those which are in potential contact (*passive* or *latent* communities) (1970: 3-4). This is where he anticipates the distinction between close and loose networks in communities (see Milroy (1980) and the discussion of social networks below). He also distinguished superordinate and subordinate communities and saw the potential of one speaker to belong to many communicative communities simultaneously.

3 For a thorough overview of historical sociolinguistic scholarship and the use of the social network framework, see Bergs (2005).

4 See also Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1998; Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Mallinson and Childs 2007.

5 This claim is in line with the uniformitarian principle (Labov 1972, Romaine 1982, Lass 1997), which allows historical linguists to use tools designed for present-day synchronic research.

6 The discussion in Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999) may help to distinguish the community of practice from such approaches in sociolinguistics as the social identity theory, speech community, social network and

the social constructionist framework. A summary of this overview has been provided more recently in Meyerhoff (2002: 531-534). Britain and Matsumoto (2005) also discuss speech community, social network and community of practice, but they concentrate on the applicability of these frameworks to the study of mono- and multilingual social groups.